

Angelo Santilli

Santilli came up through the caddy ranks learning his golf at Potowomut Golf Club where he was a looper and a greens keeper of sorts. He exchanged weed-pulling duties for weekday golfing privileges.

Santilli won a State Caddy Championship and led his high school team (West Warwick) to a state title. He was a star on the baseball field and basketball court where he was one of the state's top scorers, once scoring 42 points in a game.

His prowess as a teammate is reflected in his run of five Four-Ball titles (1955, 1961, 1963-64, and 1967) with Fred Campanelli but doesn't tell of the team's dominance. In addition to the five wins, the duo advanced to eight other finals in the era of the state's top two man teams.

To limit Angelo's accomplishment to his team play sorely underestimates his record. In addition to the State Caddy Championship, he won the State Amateur in 1955 and 1960. In fact, he made it to the finals in 1947 when he was just 22 years old. He also won nine club championships at Potowomut.

But it was an eight-month stretch that started in the September of 1953 that etched Santilli's name in Rhode Island golfing lore forever.

The 31-year old went to Oklahoma City to compete in the U.S. Amateur. And compete he did. He beat the 1950 winner and Walker Cupper Sam Urzetta and a host of others on his way to a quarterfinal match with Dale Morey. Some 20 holes later, the dream ended but ended with a bonus. His efforts earned him a trip to Augusta for the 1954 Masters Tournament the first Rhode Islander to compete at Augusta National.

Not one to leave anything to chance, he hit hundreds of balls at Potowomut all winter and even checked in at Augusta National eight days before the tournament. The only player to get there before Santilli was the defending champion, Ben Hogan, who had been there for three weeks already.

Hogan would go on to lose in a playoff to Sam Snead that year but Santilli got a few words of advice from the great man before the tournament started and a private dinner with Bobby Jones and the 14 other amateur in the field that year.

Not bad for a kid who used to pull weeds to play.